

This week's community profile: Baileys Harbor

Room for all, even the tourists

By Lisa Sumter

Press-Gazette

BAILEYS HARBOR — Walter Zahn looks out from his lakefront home and feels no urge to grab a rod and reel, although many say this is a prime fishing spot.

"If I want a fish, I'll go over to the fishermen and buy one," he says with a grin.

Zahn, 80, and his wife Estelle, 77, 8152 Wisconsin 57, say they are the oldest married natives of the community. Walter is a retired blacksmith. His shop is next door, in a building where he was born.

Piles of Estelle's knitted hats and slippers are in their living room, waiting for delivery to a nursing home in Sister Bay and charity groups in Sturgeon Bay.

The Zahns speak proudly of Baileys Harbor. They

Press-Gazette photos by John Roemer

remember a time when the community, about 65 miles north of Green Bay along Lake Michigan, thrived as a lumber and fishing center. A flour mill, sawmill, cheese factory, boat builder and blacksmiths were here.

Today, they point out the library, Baileys Harbor Town Hall, churches and a variety of businesses. The Baileys Harbor Women's Club and Lions Club also are active, the Zahns say.

They are quick to mention the lodging, dining and attractions: Cana Island Light House, The Ridges Sanctuary, the Boynton Chapel. They don't mind the tourists that summer brings.

"I think it's a necessity," Walter says. "I think all people would like it to be quiet, even the people who live in Ephraim or Fish Creek, but (the crowds are) something that goes with it."

No crowds line streets here on a winter weekday.

Dale and Wendy Graf, owners of Silver Gull Marina, 8132 Wisconsin 57, say many businesses are seasonal. Some owners stay during winter but many take off for warmer places. Many residents work in Sturgeon Bay.

As head of the Baileys Harbor Business Association, Dale is trying to build tourism. Events such as a brown trout fishing tournament in April could jumpstart the season.

Wind surfing also is gaining popularity. California visitors last summer touted Baileys Harbor as a top spot for the sport.

Cooler lake water, fewer boat mooring options and slower development contribute to keeping the east side of the Door Peninsula less congested than the west side, Dale says. That theory applies in Baileys Harbor.

But things are changing.

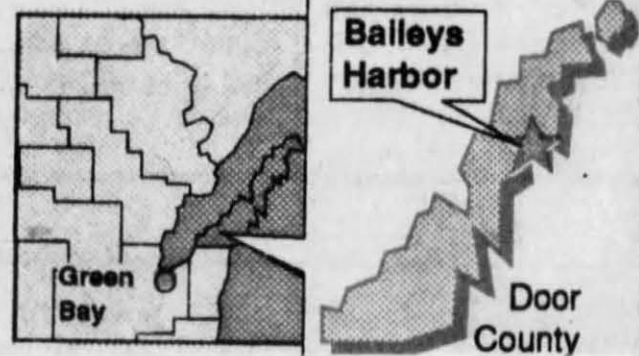
"People now realize this is a good side to get away from the crowds," Dale says. "We don't want to see it turn into a Fish Creek but we have to maintain some economic growth."

Rob and Jan Comstock, 7456 Wisconsin 57, carved out a warm, earthy niche for themselves in Baileys Harbor. Their log home, built in 1854, is the perfect complement to Erinwood, a gallery that features Jan's watercolor paintings and Rob's handcrafted 18th-century reproduction furniture.



Business team: Jan and Rob Comstock of Baileys Harbor talk

about Erinwood, their sign shop and gallery.



The Baileys Harbor file

□ **Population:** 150, estimates Dale Graf, Baileys Harbor Business Association president.

□ **History:** Baileys Harbor, once a logging camp and shipping point, was named for Capt. Justice Baileys, who along with his crew took refuge here in 1844, historical accounts say. Baileys Harbor was the first county seat in 1851.

The bread and butter of the Comstocks' business is wooden signs for businesses. They have won national and international awards for the signs, but hope to phase out that part of the operation and expand their gallery.

The Comstocks say they are content as one of many husband-and-wife business teams in this "ma and pa county."

"It's a county, but it's like the whole county becomes one town," Jan says. "There are potluck dinners — something

I was never exposed to before — and there's always a little gift when somebody comes to your house."

Before moving to Baileys Harbor three years ago, the Comstocks made frequent trips here. It made more sense to move.

"We just really, really liked this area," Rob says. "It got to the point where we'd find any excuse to come here."

■ **Next week:** Hofa Park in Shawano County



Friendly harbor: At left, Wendy and Dale Graf work behind the counter at Silver Gull Marina. Above, retired blacksmith Walter

Zahn and his wife Estelle discuss Baileys Harbor in their home, where Estelle stacks knitting goods she gives to charity.